

Tip Sheet

Managing Underperformance

TIPS

Start with a Self Check In

Who, me? Yes, you first. It's a tough question to ask yourself, but here it is:

Are you contributing to employee underperformance in any way?

Self Check

- Are your expectations reasonable? How do you know?
- Do you see potential or a burden?
- Do you provide sufficient support? Have you asked your employee this?
- Have you labeled or judged the employee?
- Are you comparing an employee to others or viewing them as a unique individual?
- What message are you sending to the employee with your words and/or actions?

If you're truly satisfied that you're not getting in the way of their success, then move on to the basics.

The Basics

The basics are the activities in the standard performance management cycle. Have a look at this post on [performance management](#) for more information. If you've covered all the basics and there's still an issue, it's time to dig deeper.

Finding the Roots

Write out in factual, non-biased terms what the issue is. It may be helpful to pull out the role standards and expectations. Here's a few examples of what this might look like:

- Jack is not meeting sales goals for 6 of 10 measures. Outline the specific numbers.
- Jill is not meeting standards for customer service delivery. Outline the issues - customer complaints, not meeting commitments, not returning phone calls etc.
- Peter is unable to perform duties without assistance. Provide details of which tasks and training that has been provided.
- Beth makes continuous, repetitive errors. Give examples.

If the issue is a lousy attitude rather than a performance measure, check out [this article](#) on how to deal with toxic employees. Once you are clear on what the issue is, you can move on to the why.

Skill or Will

Is the underperformance a matter of skill or will?

Skill

Set all your assumptions aside and base your performance assessment on facts. Here are a few points to cover.

? Has the employee been provided with sufficient and suitable training?

? Is the employee aware of their development area?

Once you've narrowed down any specific skill issues, then move on to a development plan.



Prepare a Development Plan

Have the employee take the lead in the plan. Help them through it by prompts.

? What training will you review? What resources will you use? What else might help you develop this skill? How will you measure progress? How much time is needed?

Provide a mentor if possible.

Set a specific timeline, follow up plan and clear expectations of learning outcomes, as well as consequences. Break the timeline into small chunks with short time frames. You want to see progress within a week, 2 weeks, or a month at most.

Make it clear the employee must take ownership for their learning. They are the ones not performing and who must improve in order to retain their job. You are there to support their efforts, they must make the effort.

Dealing with Cognitive Ability

There will be situations where you'll find an employee struggles with cognitive learning for the type of work required. It's not that your employee isn't smart enough, they may be in a job that doesn't play to their strengths. At this point, if you realize an employee simply does not have the cognitive learning ability for the role, it's time to have a career discussion. While the [conversation may be difficult](#), struggling at an unsuitable job is stressful and unmotivating.

When you approach the conversation with the intent to help it will go smoother.

Now that you have dealt with any skill issues, let's move on to WILL.

Will

Some employees will string you along with promises. They'll step it up for a while to give you hope, then back to the same old slacking. The employee knows they don't want to do the job, but they don't want you to know that.

Flush out Willingness



Time for a [difficult conversation](#). Your intent for this conversation is to dig in and find what's causing the problem, whether there is any intent to change, make your expectations clear, and communicate consequences if necessary. Some examples of questions to help with this discussion.

Refer to the [full article](#) for questions to flush out willingness.

Most important is that the employee is aware you won't [tolerate](#) a lack of effort.


How Much Time Should You Spend?

It makes sense to invest time in someone when you see effort and steady progress.

When the issue is skill development, provide the opportunity to learn and grow. If an employee can manage the majority of what they need to but are still a bit weak in one area, see if you can flex their job a bit.

When you identify a cognitive learning gap, deal with it quickly. You could end up wasting 6 months trying to drag someone through learning they are never going to grasp.

When the issue is will, spend minimal time. Have a few tough conversations and be clear on the consequences. There's no place in any business for an employee who isn't willing to do their job.





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